

Science Discovers What Fashion Is — And Why



A "New" French Fashion of To-day That is Compounded of Oriental Modes Hundreds of Years Old.

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FASHION is a social custom, transmitted by imitation or by tradition. It is a form of luxury, luxury in ornamentation.

Many writers have sounded the caprice of fashion, its frequent comings, its suddenness. It is changeable, unreliable, frivolous; most careful calculations are often brushed aside for the most trifling causes. "One fashion has hardly brushed aside another when it is abolished by a new one. And this in turn gives way to one which follows, but this one will not be the last," wrote La Bruyere back in the sixteenth century. "The new style of dressing makes the older fashion out of date, so forcefully and with such general agreement that it might be called a kind of mania which turns the senses round," writes Montaigne in the eighteenth century.

An English archeologist, Mr. Evans found in the Mycenaean palace of Knossos in Crete some frescoes painted 1,400 years before our era, showing ladies of the court clothed in resplendent garments, with enormous sea-of-mutton sleeves held to the neck by a narrow ribbon; their flounced skirts, ornamented with embroidered bands, are expanded behind by enormous bustles.

Writings and monuments tell us that under the Empire changes of fashion and peculiarity in costumes were customary at Rome. During the Middle Ages, an author of the twelfth century wrote: "France, whose humor varies continuously, ought to have some garments which would proclaim her instability." In the fifteenth century Robert Gaguin reproached Parisians "for always being eager for novelties and unable to retain the same style of clothing for ten successive years."

Fashion sleeps only for perpetual re-awakening, making evolutions in irregular cycles at the will of its creators. Under Henry III. we find the pointed waist, held in place by a stiff corset, the puffed sleeves; the dress already had the hoop-skirt which fashion revived again in 1830.

The reign of Henry IV. brought us the great bell skirt, built on springs, which we find later with the crinoline. This tendency toward fulness in the skirt kept increasing until 1805, bringing some dresses to enormous proportions, with ruffles adding to their size. Then, toward the end of the seventeenth century the fulness diminished, giving way to padded dresses, concealed under mantle wraps, and in 1830 they reappeared again.

Reduction in the size of the skirt continued until about 1750, when fulness again came into fashion, and by 1785 the skirts were ridiculously full, expanded with great hoops. There was another reaction, and the hoop-skirt gave way first to the bustle; then in 1793 came the one-piece dress, with a running string and without ornamentation. Greek robes were worn at fetes and on the stage. The Directoire dress, very close-fitting, exaggerated the platted style and resembled the trousers skirt of recent date. The Empire costume, with the waist high under the bosom, was only another transformation of the Directoire dress, showing at that time a tendency to fulness in the form.

After 1805 the cycles began to shorten, the wheel turned faster, and without stopping, until we find a general style used by all classes of society. Skirts were worn very full again toward 1810 and, passing through all sorts of gradations, with a partial return to fulness in the back, ended in 1860 and 1865 in the culminating point of the crinoline. This marks the departure from Orientalism and brings us toward the epoch when very simple and straight robes were worn until we reach the other extreme, the clinging gown, not forgetting the saree skirt, an exaggerated revised edition of the occidencies of the period from 1895 to 1915. We must pause to resume slowly but surely the march toward the puffed or padded styles.

The fashion created, there is haste to make it known, to launch it. Under the monarchical regimes and under the first and second Empires, the court filled that duty and gave fashion some distinction. Today the style is made public by mannequins at the race course, on the street, at the theatre, by actors on the stage, and by such social functions as a wedding or a ball.



A Lady of Fashion of Ancient Mycenae 3,000 Years Ago—Mentioned by Professor Creget and Reproduced from a Wall Painting in One of the Ruined Palaces. Note the Corseted Waist, the Fillet, the Bustle and Flounces. Beside Her is One of the Most Modern Dresses, in Which These Same Fashion Ideas Still Appear. With a Very Few Changes, the Old Mycenaean Mode Could Be Worn Now on Broadway Without Exciting Comment.

When "La Walkyrie" was first presented at the opera, white wings like those attached to Brunhilde's helmet were worn on hats, and the armor of the warlike maiden gave to dressmakers the idea of spangled robes, much resembling the breastplate.

The use of pheasant plumage became more general after the presentation of "Chatelet." We already had the "Dame Blanche" fichus, and the Lutheran bonnet was popular after "Les Huguenots" was played. Artificial flowers, originating in China, now used more for hats and similar purposes than in decorating rooms, give employment in Paris alone to 10,000 women and 3,000 men, receiving \$2,200,000 in wages, for a production valued at \$6,700,000. And it is to fashion that is due the present prosperity in false hair and perfumery trades. Each year 130,000 kilograms of hair are utilized in France, and the importation from China and

WHY There Can Never Be Any Really NEW Fashions---
WHY the Adoption of Trousers Was the Greatest Change in History---
WHY Fashion Marks Humanity's Superiority Over Other Animals---
WHY Man Will Never Be Able to Regulate Fashion---

All Gravely Explained by a Solemn French Scientist



How the Ladies of Queen Elizabeth's Day Wore Stiffs—From an Old Print. One of the Abuses Mentioned by Professor Creget.

reasonable expenditure in following fashions is most harmful.

These abuses, this tyranny of uniformity in nearly all outer manifestations of life, lead notably to the banishment of provincial costumes, the representatives of climate, products of local art, so full of interest from an historical standpoint, picturesque, stable, durable, which are handed down from generation to generation. Among these costumes of historic interest are the Caux cap recalling the steeple headress of ladies of the fourteenth century; the little Nicaean hat reproducing the coiffure called "Thessalonian" by the Greeks, and the antique Phrygian hat, still worn by the Arisiens. Although formerly there was variation according to place and uniformity as to the season, we now tend more and more toward a uniformity as to place and variation as to season.

Human fancy thus asserts its supremacy over animals, obliged always to wear the same livery. Austere philosophers have understood perfectly the aesthetic and social significance of fashion. Renan, writing on Marcus Aurelius, admits that "woman in dressing herself well fulfills a duty; she practices an art, an exquisite art, in a sense the most charming of arts. * * * A woman's toilet, with its refinements, is a great art in its way. Ages and countries which know how to carry it out well are great ages, great countries."

The appearance of a new style of garment is the visible sign that a transformation is taking place in the intellect, customs and business of a people. The rise of the Chinese Republic, for instance, led to doing away with platted hair and to the adoption of the European costume.

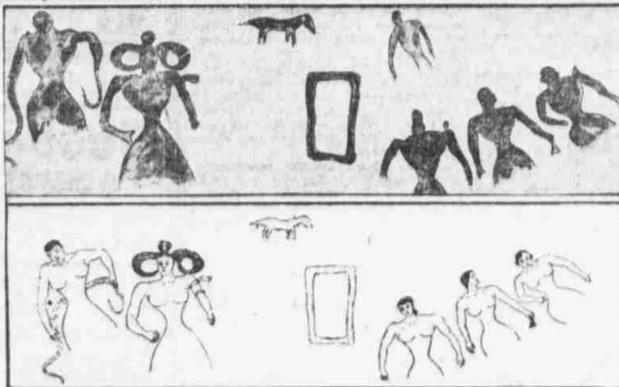
Taine wrote this profound saying: "My decided opinion is that the greatest change in history was the advent of trousers. * * * It marked the passage of Greek and Roman civilization to the modern. * * * Nothing is more difficult to alter than a universal and daily custom. In order to take away man's clothes and dress him up again you must demolish and remodel him."

It is also an equally philosophical conclusion which M. Louis Bourdeau gives in his interesting "Histoire de l'habillement et de la parure": "There where the same style of clothing is used for centuries, as among barbarous peoples, one has the right to say that civilization remains stationary. There, on the other hand, where, as in Europe, garments are subject to continual modifications, one may see evidence of great comfort and rapid progress. * * * Far from being a custom of incurable frivolity, the changes of fashions mark a high civilization, subject to change because it is growing and because it has wide latitude to refine its ideal in proportion as its productions are varied." Again, it is necessary that that versatility and refinement be not turned to extravagance or to impropriety, compromising the reputation for good taste, elegance and distinction.

What can we do for or against fashion? Can we direct it or can we prevent its abuse? Let us find out first the power of the law, religious or civil. Very early Popes and councils strove in vain against the low-neck gown and the dresses "terminating in the serpent's tail." Kings imitated them, Charlemagne setting the example, but sumptuary decrees have had no more effect than ordinances against duelling.

M. Victor du Bled reports that Philippe le Bel was urged to promulgate some sumptuary laws by his wife, who, making her formal entrance at Bruges in 1301, saw a crowd of common people so richly clothed, that she cried out with vexation, "I thought myself the queen, and I see hundreds of them." Charles IX. proscribed hip pads of more than five feet, gold chains, pieces of jewelry with or without enamel. In 1587 he regulated the garments of each class, permitting silk only to princesses and duchesses, forbidding velvet—without any lasting success.

Fashion is, apparently, beyond regulation by law.



The First Panel Shows a Wall Painting in a Prehistoric Spanish Cavern Known as the Cave of the Women. The Second is a Restoration of the Figures as they Probably Appeared When Made Quite 15,000 Years Ago. Here Are Seen the Wasp Waists, the Exaggerated Headdresses and the Girdle Just as in the Fashions of Yesterday and To-day.

Japan vary from year to year with change of style, from 8,000 to 15,000 kilograms. What are the economical results of fashion? In the industrial world, first of all, it seems to be a stimulant to production; but it is solely in objects to which it offers itself, for the estimates are not

elastic—an increase in one article leads to retrenchment in another, and the demand is merely changed from one industry to another. Thus enormous fluctuations are shown each year in the silk industries, on which the uncertainties of fashion are most particularly centered. Ribbon is most affected, being much used,

both on hats and clothes. It loses first one fashion, then another, and the evolution is tending rapidly toward the cheapest grades used so much for ornaments and in the thousand little gewgaws of women.

In the agricultural world fashion has produced transformations no less serious, some of them unfortunate.

In the animal world certain species of fur animals are on the verge of extinction, and there should be either attempts at domestication, as in the case of the blue fox and the opossum, or hunting regulations by the creation of open districts with complete prohibition during a certain period.

"To follow the fashion" becomes not only a pastime, but even a duty; "intellects are made frivolous thereby; those who pride themselves in appearing elegant are obliged to make the clothing of themselves a veritable occupation and a study, which assuredly does not tend to elevate the mind, nor does it render them capable of great things."

To this moral and social evil an economic difficulty is also added. Fashion is a waste; "it has the privilege of casting things aside before they have lost their freshness; it multiplies consumption and condemns that which is still good, comfortable and pretty for something that is no better. Besides, it robs a State of that which it consumes and that which it does not consume." M. Pierre Mille told recently of patrons who spent as much as \$60,000 each year, others up to \$16,000, and a still greater number up to \$5,000. But it is mostly among the middle and laboring classes, whose means are more limited, that un-